

File Code: 1950

Date: May 10, 2012

Dear Interested Party,

Enclosed is a copy of the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the West Bridger/Carey Gulch Allotment Management Plan Update for your review and comment. This EA addresses the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of continuing proposed livestock grazing on the West Bridger and Carey Gulch Allotments located approximately 20 miles southeast of Big Timber, Montana in the area of Lower Deer Creeks, West Bridger Creek and Derby Gulch.). The West Bridger Allotment includes all or portions of the following sections: T2S, R14E, Sections 25, and 36, T3S, R14E, Sections 1, 12, 13, 14, 23, 24, 25, and 36, T2S, R15E, Sections 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, and 36, T3S, R15E, Sections 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 29, 30 and 31 (20,746 acres). The Carey Gulch Allotment is located in T2S, R15E, Section 36 and T3S, R15E, Sections 1, 12 and 13 (1632 acres), and includes private land in T2S, R16E, Section 31 and 32, and T3S, R16E, Sections 5, 6, 7, 18, (1093 acres), and BLM land in T2S, R16E, Section 31 and T3S, R16E, Sections 6 and 7 (145 acres).

The EA analyzes in detail Alternative 1(No Grazing), Alternative 2 (Current Management), and Alternative 3 (Adaptive Management). Two other alternatives were considered but not in detailed analysis.

Alternative 1 would phase out and discontinue grazing on all of the allotments. Alternative 2 would continue grazing under current management techniques. Alternative 3 would incorporate Adaptive Management Strategies into the Updated Allotment Management Plans. This analysis was prepared to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Council of Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations, and the Gallatin National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (1987). The information and analysis in this document will be used to determine whether to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) or a finding of no significant impact (FONSI) (40 CFR 1508.9).

At this time, based on field reconnaissance and the analysis presented in the EA, the Forest Service preferred alternative is Alternative 3, which incorporates Adaptive Management Strategies. With Alternative 3, the length of time and numbers of livestock allowed, as well as the need for additional range improvements, would be determined based upon how well individual resource objectives are being achieved. Systematic monitoring would occur, with results being evaluated by the Range Specialist and the Line Officer to make adjustments to management as needed. This would ensure adequate progress toward desired resource and properly functioning conditions. The grazing permit and allotment management plan would be revised to incorporate a combination of Forest Plan utilization standards for livestock grazing, Region 1 riparian guidelines, and Adaptive Management Strategies. Implementation of this project would occur through incorporation of the selected alternative into the allotment management plans (AMPs) specific to the individual allotments. Systematic monitoring methods would be specified in the allotment management plans.



The Forest Service is accepting comments on West Bridger/Carey Gulch Allotment Management Plan Update EA for 30 days, with all timely public comments being considered. In submitting comments, please provide specific facts along with supporting reasons that you believe should be considered by the Responsible Official (Yellowstone District Ranger) in reaching a decision. Comments may be submitted in writing, orally, or through electronic means. The legal notice for the project is being published in the newspaper of record (Bozeman Daily Chronicle) with the comment period starting on the day following publication. Written comments must be postmarked by the end of the 30-day comment period. Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on and will be available for public inspection.

A complete EA with maps is also available for viewing and downloading on the Gallatin NF website at: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/gallatin/landandresourcemanagement/projects>. To request a paper copy of the EA contact Barbara Ping by phone at (406)-522-2558, fax at (406)-522-2528, or by email to Barbara Ping at bping@fs.fed.us.

Send written comments to:
Barbara Ping, East Zone NEPA Coordinator
West Bridger/Carey Gulch Allotments EA
Bozeman Ranger District
3710 Fallon Street, Suite C; Bozeman, MT 59718

Written comments must be postmarked by the Postal Service, hand delivered, e-mailed, faxed, or otherwise submitted by 11:59 p.m. on the 30th calendar day following publication of the legal notice.

Oral comments must be provided at the Responsible Official's office during normal business hours (8:00-4:30), via telephone, or in person, or if during non-business hours, must be at an official agency function (such as a public meeting), which is designed to elicit public comment:

Alex Sienkiewicz-Yellowstone District Ranger
Big Timber Office
Box 1130
Big Timber, MT 59011
(406)-932-5155
Business hours (8:00-4:30)

Electronic comments may be submitted to FS-comments-northern-gallatin@fs.fed.us. Insert West Bridger/Carey Gulch Allotments EA in the subject line. Acceptable formats are MS Word, Word Perfect, or RTF. For electronically mailed comments, the sender should normally receive an automated electronic acknowledgement from the agency as confirmation of receipt. If the sender does not receive an automated acknowledgement of the receipt of comments, it is the sender's responsibility to ensure timely receipt by other means.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record and will be available for public inspection. Each individual or representative from each organization must either sign the comments or verify identity upon request in order to have standing to either appeal the subsequent decision under 36

CFR Part 215, or possibly object under new regulations pertaining to the objection process under Section 428 of the 2012 Consolidated Appropriations Act, and to be accepted as appellants.

Additionally, pursuant to 7 CFR 1.27(d), any person may request the agency to withhold a submission from the public record by showing how the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) permits such confidentiality. Persons requesting such confidentiality should be aware that, under FOIA, confidentiality may be granted in only very limited circumstances, such as to protect trade secrets. The Forest Service will inform the requester of the agency's decision regarding the request for confidentiality, and to whom the request may be resubmitted with or without name and address within 15 days.

If you have any questions regarding this project, please contact Barbara Ping at the above address or call her at (406) 522-2558.

Sincerely,

/s/ Lauren Oswald for: Alex Sienkiewicz
ALEX SIENKIEWICZ
District Ranger